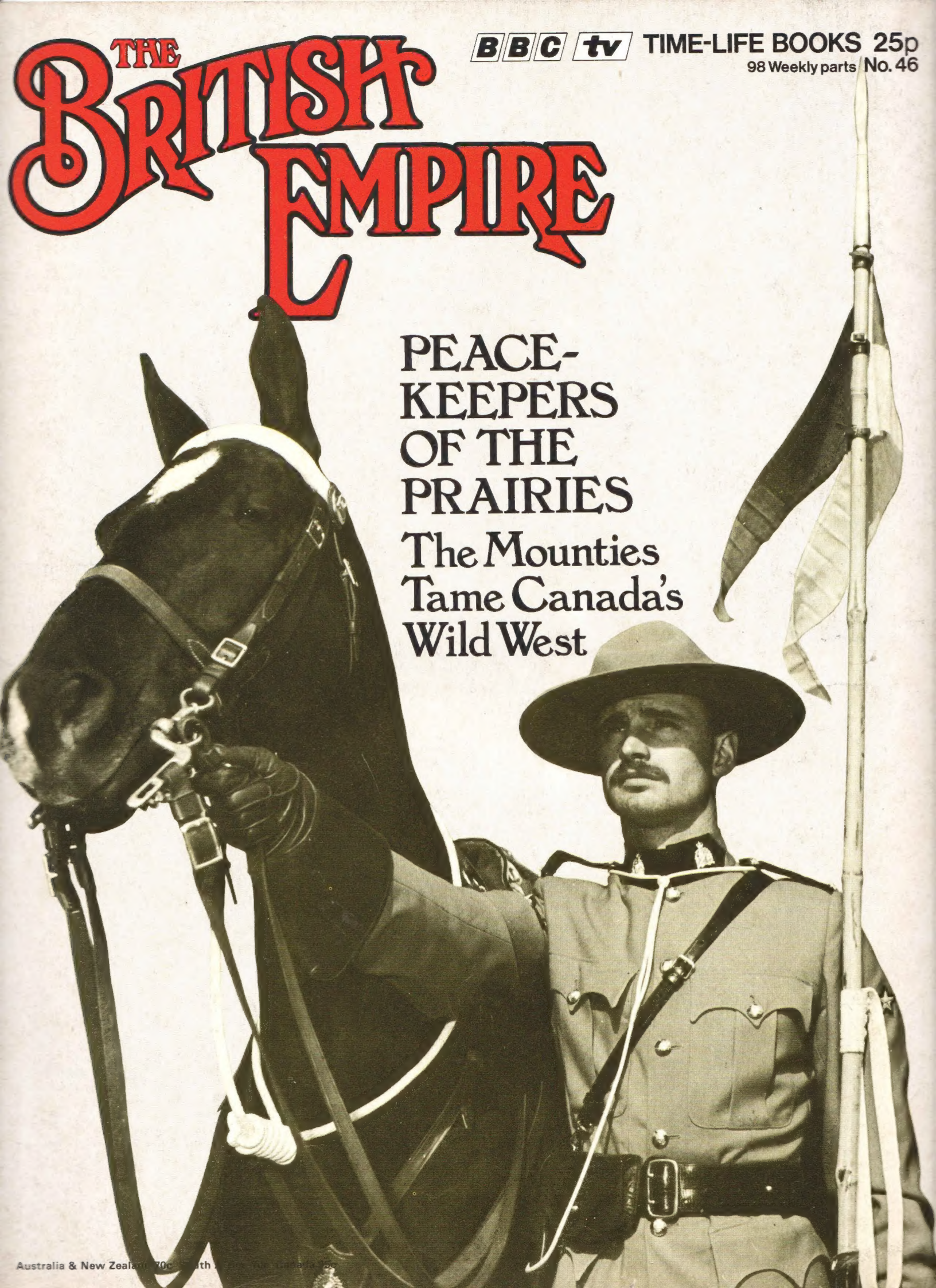
BBC tv TIME-LIFE BOOKS 25p
98 Weekly parts No. 46

THE BRITISH EMPIRE



PEACE-KEEPERS OF THE PRAIRIES

The Mounties Tame Canada's Wild West

Australia & New Zeala[illegible]70c [illegible]

THE BRITISH EMPIRE

BBC tv TIME-LIFE BOOKS 25p
98 Weekly parts No. 46

Editor Harold C. Field
Deputy Editor John Man
Picture Editor Jean I. Tennant
Design Consultant Louis Klein
Staff Writers Stephen Webbe, Simon Rigge, Susan Hillaby
Picture Researchers Marian Berman, Pamela Marke
Art Director Robert Hook
Assistant Art Director Graham Davis
Art Assistant Bridget Allan
Editorial Assistant Anne Morgan
Staff Photographer Eileen Tweedy
Partwork Director Kurt Medina
Sales Director George Gillespie
Consultants D.K.Fieldhouse, Lecturer in Commonwealth History and Fellow of Nuffield College, Oxford
A.F.Madden, Reader in Commonwealth Government and Fellow of Nuffield College, Oxford

JIM HICKS, author of the text sections of this issue, is a product of Britain's First Empire, America. Born in Texas, he received an MA from Northwestern University where he read political science and history. As London Bureau Chief for LIFE magazine, he wrote an eyewitness report of the events accompanying Rhodesia's Unilateral Declaration of Independence. He now lives and works in London.

Subscriptions – These are available at £6·50 for six months, inclusive of postage and packing. For addresses outside of the United Kingdom, the rate is £8·75, inclusive of surface postage and packing.
Back Numbers – These are available at your local newsagent or may be secured by post for the inclusive price of 25p per issue. Be sure and specify which issue(s) you desire.
Orders for both subscriptions and back numbers should be sent, with remittance, to *The British Empire*, BBC Publications, 35 Marylebone High St., London W1M 4AA.
Binders – These may be ordered at £1·05 for the Standard edition and £1·75 for the Deluxe edition, either individually or on subscription. Orders, with remittance, should be sent to *British Empire Binders*, BBC Publications, P.O. Box No. 126, London SE1 5JZ.
NOTE: All above payments should be by crossed cheque/P.O.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: (*t*=top; *b*=bottom; *l*=left; *r*=right; *c*=centre). Cover: Canadian Government Travel Bureau. Inside back cover: The Parker Gallery, London. Trustees of the British Museum 1280*t*, 1280/1*b*; Camera Press 1286/7*b*, 1287*br*; Canadian Government Travel Bureau 1287*tr*; Glenbow-Alberta Institute, Calgary, Alberta 1264, 1276/7, 1278, 1281*t*, 1282/3 (except 1282*l*); National Film Board of Canada 1286*tl*, 1286*c*, 1286/7*t*, 1287*c*; Notman Photographic Archives, McCord Museum, McGill University 1282*l*, 1285; Radio Times Hulton Picture Library 1276*b*; Royal Canadian Mounted Police Archives, Ottawa 1263*r*, 1265, 1279, 1284, 1288. PHOTOGRAPHER: Eileen Tweedy 1280*t*, 1280/1*b*, inside back cover. MAP: David Nash. ARTIST: G.A. Embleton 1267–1275.

© 1972. Time-Life International (Nederland) N.V.

Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission is prohibited.

Published by Time-Life International (Nederland) N.V. in co-operation with the British Broadcasting Corporation.

Distributed in the U.K. by Time-Life International Ltd. and BBC Publications.

Printed in England by Jarrold and Sons Ltd. Norwich.

BY THE WAY

A recent Reuters report provides an interesting postscript to Issue 22, which dealt in part with the establishment of a British presence on the Cocos-Keeling islands by John Clunies-Ross.

"Canberra, Aug 30 – Mr. Andrew Peacock, the Australian Minister for External Territories, admitted today the accuracy of reports that a neo-feudal system existed on the Australian-administered Cocos island in the Indian Ocean.

"He told the House of Representatives that the man who held the overwhelming portion of land on the island, Mr. John Clunies-Ross, considered he held 'absolute sovereignty' over the inhabitants.

"The affair came to light as a result of disclosures last night about information contained in a confidential and official report which said that 'Australia could be internationally embarrassed by the neo-feudal system on Cocos.'

"Reliable government sources said the report alleged that Malays on the island were paid as little as $A2 (less than £1) a week and could work only for Mr. Clunies-Ross.

"'The relationship between Mr. Clunies-Ross is one based on the concept that he holds absolute sovereignty himself over the inhabitants. This is a view with which I do not concur.'

"Britain handed over the 27 coral islands in the group, about 1,270 miles north-west of Perth, to Australia 17 years ago, conditional on the Clunies-Ross family retaining ownership of their property and the islanders being given the opportunity to take Australian citizenship."

All letters please to: **The British Empire, 76, Oxford Street, London W.1.**

CONTENTS

1261. Peace-Keepers of the Prairies
The origins of the North-West Mounted Police, formed to pacify Canada's wild west, the vast, barely inhabited North-West Territories.

1267. Picture Essay: Cavalry for Peace
How the Mounties, a crack cavalry unit, established an astonishing and well-deserved reputation for good works.

1276. Peace with the Indians
The Mounties' part in incorporating, without serious bloodshed, nomadic Indian tribes into the framework of a white, Western state.

1280. Picture Essay: A Doomed Nation
A last glimpse of the Indian way of life and the sad results that followed the arrival of modern civilization.

1284. The White Invasion
New duties for the Mounties as a rush of white settlers opened up the prairies.

Cover: A Mountie on parade displays the *esprit de corps* and pride of uniform that first grew up in the 1870s, when the force was founded, and has been maintained ever since.

PEACE-KEEPERS OF THE PRAIRIES

After the Hudson's Bay Company handed over its vast North-West Territories to infant Canada in 1870, there existed a vacuum of authority in the region. From Manitoba to the Rocky Mountains, from the U.S. border to beyond the Arctic Circle, the rule of the toughest and meanest prevailed.

For four years, this vast section of the British Empire knew no law but the gun – and there were guns in plenty, wielded by marauding Indians, ruthless American whisky-dealers and wild half-breeds. To end the chaos, Canada's government created a unique peace-keeping body, the North-West Mounted Police. Half-military and half-civil, always undermanned and ever overworked, the force adhered to the motto on its crest (above): "Uphold the Right" ❧

by Jim Hicks

"The wrong-doer does not appear to violate any law," reported an Army officer sent to inspect Canada's newly acquired North-West Territories in 1870, "because there is no law to violate. Robbery and murder for years have gone unpunished. Indian massacres are unchecked. Civil and legal institutions are entirely unknown." Overnight, Canada had acquired its own wild west.

In the 2,300,000 square miles that the young nation had inherited from the Hudson's Bay Company, some 30,000 Indians roamed the plains in pursuit of buffalo, and made casual, savage, and continual war upon each other. But if anyone could claim to rule the land, perhaps it was the illegal whisky traders, Americans who came north in increasing numbers, ignoring the prohibition of alcohol in the North-West Territories and preying upon the Indians more mercilessly than the Indians preyed upon the buffalo. This was the most anarchic element in the explosive combination of Indians, traders and settlers that finally led the government to found a world-famous force – the Mounted Police, "the Mounties" – to pacify Canada's remoter areas.

For what the traders sold the Indians, "whisky" was a misnomer. Generally, it consisted of alcohol diluted with three parts of water and coloured with tea-leaves, or dark herbs. (The worldly Blackfeet were discriminating: they demanded real fire-water, that is, spirit which would burn, and insisted on testing the goods with a flame before purchase.)

The traders operated from posts fortified to fend off Indians who were not always pleased when they awoke with bad heads and realized they had traded all their goods for one big drinking-bout. The most notorious of these, Fort Whoop-Up (the derivation of the name is disputed but its contribution to the modern language obvious) even possessed a cannon in case of trouble.

At Whoop-Up, as at Fort Slide-Out (from which traders had slid out at night to escape Indian attacks) and Fort Stand-Off (where an American sheriff in pursuit of an Indian had been made to keep his distance), the drink was dispensed from a small window in the fort gate, behind which sat a trader with tub of alcohol on one side and loaded pistol on the other.

An Indian could buy 20 cups of liquor for a buffalo robe or three gallons for a good horse, although some traders were chary of accepting horses since the customers so often tried to steal them back the next day. The Indians tended to drink the whole purchase in one sustained bout, and would soon return to offer their wives or even their best dogs for more of the heady stuff.

The trade had an insidious effect on the whole pattern of life. The Indians abandoned traditional camp grounds to gather round the whisky-traders' posts, wearing rags because they had swopped their fine robes for fire-water. Whereas they had always hunted buffalo only for their needs, they now killed the animals wantonly to get skins for barter – using new repeating rifles they bought from the traders – establishing a pattern of destruction that within a few years would destroy their primary source of food.

Those rifles, too, escalated the scale of tribal warfare to a new savagery and, in combination with drunkenness, debased the red man's brutal but hitherto honest code of morality. In 1871 alone, 88 Blackfeet were murdered in whisky-sodden brawls at Edmonton.

Not that whites in the North-West Territories set much of an example of civilized behaviour, as this letter, purportedly sent from Whoop-Up to Fort Benton, Montana, illustrates: "Dear Friend – My partner, Will Geary, got to putting on airs and I shot him and he is dead. The potatoes is looking well. Yours truly, Snookum Jim."

Adding to the anarchy on the Canadian plains were the "wolfers." These men, mainly half-breeds, poisoned buffalo carcasses and collected pelts from the wolves who died feeding on them. Indians loathed the practice because their hunting-dogs were often killed by the poisoned bait. Wolfers in turn hated the traders for selling rifles to the Indians.

Each faction sought to protect its interests by violence. A group of some 25 wolfers, a small army of hoodlums who called themselves "The Spitzee Cavalry," rode into Fort Whoop-Up one day and caught the head trader, a man named

Hamilton, unprotected. He sat stirring his fire with a poker while they brandished guns at him and warned him to stop selling rifles to the Indians. Hamilton finally stood up and, holding the red-hot poker above an open keg of gunpowder, said, "Clear out, or we'll all go to hell together," which quickly ended the conversation.

During this period of increasing lawlessness another of the white man's introductions added to Indian sorrows: smallpox. In 1870 and 1871, an epidemic swept the plains killing about a third of the Indians. The Sarcees, a proud tribe several thousand strong, were reduced to a few hundred pock-marked survivors.

Indians believed white traders had started the epidemic on purpose by selling them cast-off, contaminated clothing, and they were determined on revenge. They left corpses of smallpox victims exposed on the windward side of the forts and tore off their own scabs to rub on gates and door-handles, in hopes of infecting whites who touched them.

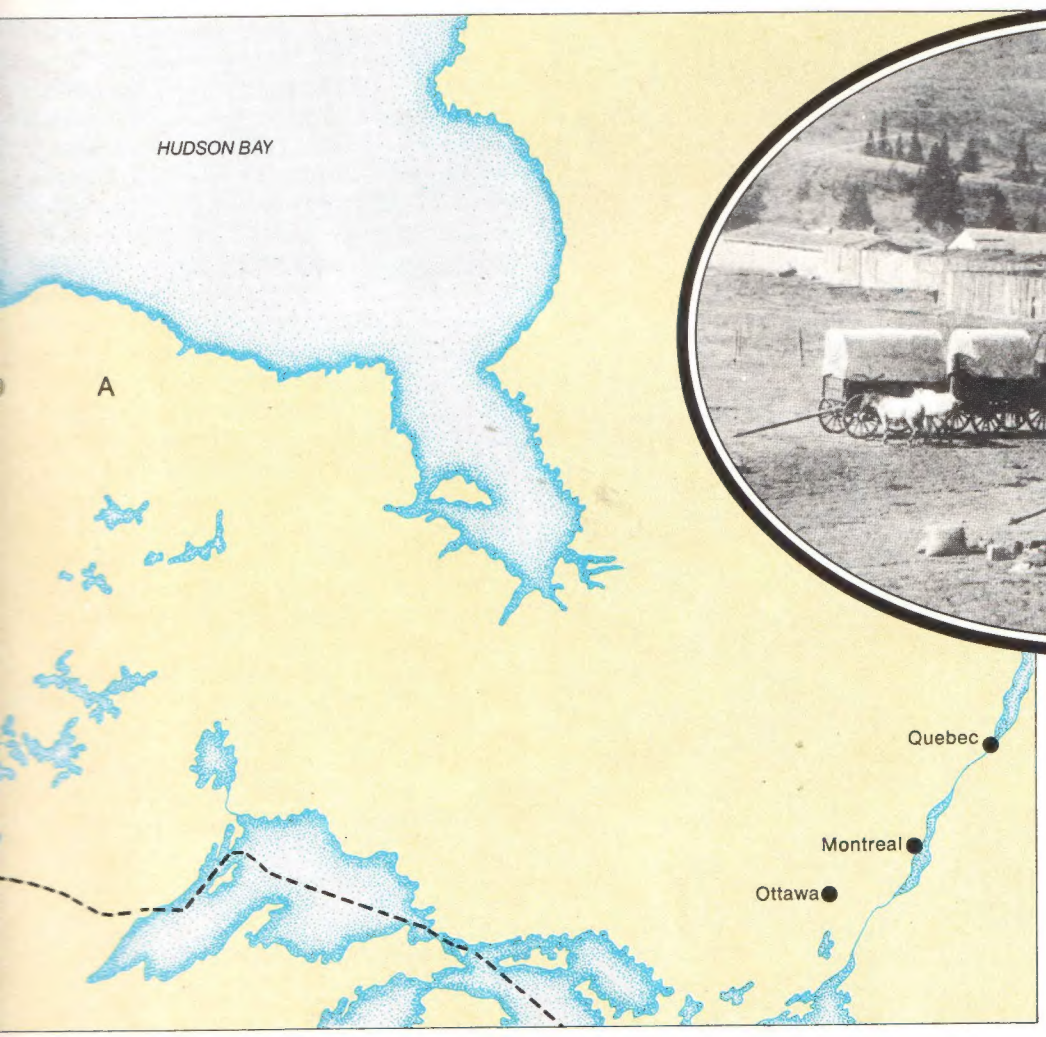
The government in Ottawa worried about the volatile situation in the North-West Territories. South of the boundary, Indians had long been waging an all-out war with the U.S. Army, a war which was costing the American government $20,000,000 a year. Canada could not afford a similar rebellion: that sum was roughly equivalent to its government's total annual revenue.

In 1872 the Adjutant-General, Colonel P. Robertson-Ross, visited the North-West Territories and recommended that 300 mounted riflemen be sent to establish a chain of small forts and bring order to the plains. Any dissension there may have been to this suggestion in Ottawa was cut short when word reached the capital of the latest and most shocking incident of violence in the west. At Cypress Hills near the American border a band of Assiniboine Indians had been coolly slaughtered by men who found them drunk and opened fire from behind rocks that surrounded their camp.

Stories of the massacre varied. One account said the killers were wolfers avenging the theft of a horse. Another agreed they were wolfers, but said they had shot the wrong Indians – that another group had stolen the horse. A third version was that some American whisky-traders had sold out their stock to the Indians, and killed them before they drank all of it because it was the easiest way to replenish their inventory. Whatever the circumstances, between 30 and 80 Indian men, women and children – all British subjects – had been ruthlessly murdered on Canadian soil.

Shortly afterwards, on May 23, 1873, the Canadian Parliament authorized the creation of the North-West Mounted Police. Sir John A. Macdonald, the Prime Minister, knew the United States would object to a military force in the North-West Territories, despite the fact that it kept a large army on its side of the border, so he changed Robertson-Ross's suggestion of "mounted riflemen" to "mounted police." In practice, however, it would be a crack cavalry outfit.

Macdonald wanted a tough force with "as little gold lace and fuss and feathers as possible," but he accepted Robertson-Ross's recommendation that they wear scarlet túnics. "We know that the soldiers of our Great Mother," an Indian chief



The Mounties' great trek of 1874 took them from Dufferin to far-away outposts across a continent (see map). Before the trek ended, part of the force had travelled 1,959 miles. And afterwards, life remained rough. At Mountie outposts like Fort Walsh (above), wagon-trains provided only fitful supplies.

had told the Adjutant-General, "wear red coats and are our friends."

It was a wise decision. Indians despised the blue-coated American cavalry they encountered on the other side of the line. On one occasion soon after going west, a group of Mounted Police wearing blue overcoats were surprised to find themselves staring into the rifle-muzzles of Indians they had thought friendly. When a quick-thinking officer threw open his overcoat to reveal the scarlet uniform beneath, the Indians lowered their weapons and greeted them.

Parliament approved a force of 300 men between the ages of 18 and 40, "of sound constitution, able to ride, active and able-bodied, of good character." The first Commissioner, Colonel G.A. French, observed that many who enlisted could not ride at all, but that on the march west "there would be ample opportunity for the practice of equitation." Ample indeed, as the recruits would learn.

Despite low pay – $1 per day for a constable, 75 cents for a sub-constable – French had no trouble filling his complement. They signed on for a minimum of three years, but during training the cold-eyed, fearsome Commissioner with his huge handle-bar moustache repeatedly urged those who might want to quit, to quit immediately. Not many did.

Scouts employed by the Mounties at Fort Macleod include Jerry Potts (standing, right) who, "despite a thirst which a camel might have envied," was superb at his reconnaissance job.

The force assembled at Fort Dufferin, Manitoba, in June, 1874. While awaiting a late shipment of revolvers from England, they prepared for their forthcoming trek in temperatures of up to 100 degrees Fahrenheit, tormented by swarms of mosquitoes. Some of the men deserted, but that did not bother French. "Oh! Mosquitoes!" he said. "You have not felt any yet; just wait until you get to the Pembina River or the Souris."

The pistols arrived; guides and half-breed drovers were hired. At last, on July 8, 1874, some 300 men – with 310 horses, 142 oxen, 73 wagons, 114 carts, 33 head of beef cattle, two nin-pounder guns, two mortars, farm implements and a six-month supply of tea, sugar, flour, bacon and tobacco – struck out on what would be known in Canadian history as "The Great March." As they departed, an old-timer from the North-West Territories cheered French: "Well, if you have luck you may get back by Christmas with forty per cent of your horses."

The Great March of the North-West Mounted Police was surely the most amazing procession that had ever been seen on the plains. "To a stranger it would have appeared an astonishing cavalcade," said French. "Armed men and guns looked as if fighting was to be done. What could plows, harrows, mowing machines, cows, calves, etc., be for?" Heading for regions inhabited only by nomadic Indians, hunters, trappers and dealers in illegal whisky, the force was prepared to support itself. When tightened up in close order it was one and a half miles long; usually the giant centipede of men, animals and equipment stretched over five miles from van to rear.

"An easy and agreeable march of a few weeks duration," Robertson-Ross had predicted, "would suffice to establish them in their respective posts of occupation." It soon proved to be neither easy nor at all agreeable.

Eventually, 31 men had deserted before the force left Dufferin. News of a Sioux massacre of American settlers in Minnesota had proved a greater impulse to desertion than had mosquitoes. The second night on the trail, a thunder-

G.A. French, first Commissioner of the Mounties, was as firm as his handle-bar moustache in his dedication to Empire. He went on to serve the British Army in Australia and India, rising to Major-General.

storm stampeded 20 horses which had to be rounded up the following day. That day, too, French reviewed the overburdened train and sent three wagonloads of "luxuries" back to Dufferin.

They ran into a plague of locusts the first week, "the air being literally alive with them," and for weeks after the horses fed badly because locusts had consumed all the grass. Only 11 days from Dufferin, French ordered a cut in rations, as it was apparent the journey would take longer than expected. By July 19, the rearguard, under Inspector Cecil E. Denny, was so far behind the main body that it had to camp alone, without rations for the men or water for their animals.

Their knowledge of the prairie was inadequate. At times they camped by mosquito-infested swamps for the benefit of the high grass growing there, not realizing that the short grass on higher ground was more nutritious for horses anyway. Changes in temperature were shattering to men and animals unaccustomed to the extremes normal in the plains: within a couple of hours on one afternoon, the mercury plummeted from 99° to 44° Fahrenheit.

Water-holes were found less frequently as they moved west along the international border. Wagons were continually breaking down, horses kept collapsing from thirst and exhaustion and the cattle had to be prodded constantly to keep them moving. The men were ordered to walk alternate hours to save their horses, but by the time they reached the Souris River a fortnight out of Dufferin, some horses had already died and more had to be left behind.

On July 27, at Roche Percée, 270 miles from Dufferin, rations were again reduced. From here "A" Troop under an inspector named Jarvis was sent north to Edmonton. French assigned to Jarvis 24 wagons, 55 carts, 62 oxen and 55 of the weakest horses.

Struggling for 88 days through thick mud and thicker forests this detachment chopped its own trail through the woods, laid corduroy roads over marshy ground and built bridges and rafts to cross numerous rivers. The oxen slowed. Many horses died and others collapsed. Since a live horse, however weak, was too valuable to abandon, some were actually carried by parties of men for miles.

James Macleod, second Commissioner of the force, was famous for his integrity. An Indian chief said of him: "He made me many promises. He kept them all."

French and the main body marched on westward, with no lack of difficulties of their own. On August 3, a storm hit the camp, levelling the tents. On August 4, they left the Boundary Commission Trail and struck off north-westwards, in the general direction of the whisky trading-posts they were to close down. Two days later, from high ground, French caught sight of yet another possible hazard to his company – a great prairie fire sweeping all the way across the horizon to the south. That same day the Mounties recorded their first death, when a man in "E" Troop succumbed to fever.

On August 8, 500 miles from Dufferin, the rearguard was two full days behind the main party. On August 12, rations were cut to ½lb of bread per man per day. French mistrusted his guide, who seemed unable to find water where he promised it would be. "I am not certain whether his actions are due to ignorance or design. He is the greatest liar I have ever met." French suspected the guide of being in league with the enemy – the man kept providing reports that the traders were strengthening their forts and would fight – and began trying to find his way with an old map and a compass.

He had to erect quarters somewhere before winter and pushed on to the junction of the Bow and Belly rivers, which, he had been led to believe, was both near his objective of Fort Whoop-Up and "a luxuriant pasturage, a perfect garden of Eden." He found instead that it was "little better than a desert; not a tree to be seen anywhere, ground parched and poor, and wherever there was a little swamp it had been destroyed by buffalo.

"What a very serious position we were now in. The appalling fact was ever pressing on my mind that on the 20th of September last year the whole country from the Cypress Hills to the Old Wives' Lake was covered with a foot of snow." He sent parties exploring across the Belly River to the west. They found no decent vegetation, but one group ran into a war-party of about 50 Assiniboine Indians who seemed perplexed by the redcoats and did not fire.

The situation was desperate. Several oxen starved to death while French

camped by the Belly River. Horses were sickened with the autumn chill and each man was required to give up one blanket to his mount. Many animals died anyway. "If a few hours' cold rain kills off a number of horses," wondered French, "what would be the effect of a 24-hours' snowstorm?" The men, too, would suffer dreadfully; a blizzard would bury the dry buffalo manure that was now the expedition's only fuel.

In search of security, French dispatched a small body of men to an area with good but limited supplies of water and grass on the North Swan River, while the rest of the force camped on the trail between Whoop-Up and Fort Benton, over the border in Montana. French then went to that American town with his Assistant Commissioner, James Macleod. Two weeks later Macleod – French having gone on to the North Swan River camp – returned with a genuine and badly needed prize: an excellent guide. He was Jerry Potts, was paid $90 a month (more than some of the high-ranking officers) and was worth every penny. A short, heavy-set man, half-Scot and half-Piegan Indian, Potts was reputed to have tracked down and slain his father's murderers while only a child. He had led the Blackfeet in a battle with the Crees in 1870, and, it was said, emerged with a head wound, an arrow through his body and 19 Cree scalps on his belt.

Potts's value to the Mounties was not in his ferocity, however, but in his intelligence and wilderness-sense, which he was to employ on behalf of the force until he died in 1906. Now he led the Mounties to a good position to build a fort. He pointed the way, rode out ahead, and when the group caught up with him towards the end of the day he had a buffalo killed, dressed and on the fire. He consistently found better spring-water than the Mounties had drunk since the start of the march.

Using neither map nor compass he conducted them to a sheltered spot on Old Man's River, where they would build Fort Macleod. On the way to the site the expedition visited Forts Whoop-Up and Slide-Out. A few traders with their squaws were in residence, but they professed to do only legal business, and the Mounties could not find a drop of alcohol. It seemed that simply the news of the force's imminent arrival had been enough to bring law and order to the North-West Territories. The reputation of the North-West Mounted Police had been born before they even started work.

James Farquharson Macleod, who replaced French as the Mounties' Commissioner the following year, was known by Indians as "Stamixotokon" – Bull's Head – perhaps for his mutton-chop whiskers which gave him a remarkable resemblance to a bull buffalo, or possibly because of his reputation for strength, both physical and moral. Educated for the Bar, he insisted on being scrupulously fair with everyone: accused criminals, Indians, his men – and his horses.

"I had made up my mind," he said of the fort which bore his name, "that not a single log of men's quarters should be laid till the horses, as well as the sick men, were provided for." Then came shelter for the men, and, only after that, for the officers.

Built of earth-chinked logs round a square and roofed with lumps of earth dug from the prairie, Fort Macleod was finished before Christmas, but a rude village had sprung up round it already. A trader named I.G. Baker came from Fort Benton to open a store where a man could buy one tin of vegetables or fruit for $1, a day's wages. His shop was soon followed by a billiard-parlour, a barber-shop, a shoe-store and gambling joints run by "Poker" Brown and "Ace" Samples, where stakes were high, but – with police for customers – where violence was infrequent.

Fort MacLeod's guardroom soon had its first prisoners: a trader named Harry "Kamoose" (Woman-Stealing) Taylor, and a Negro helper named Bond, who were caught driving a wagon-load of whisky towards the Montana border-line. "Kamoose," who in his youth had studied for the Ministry, was so-called because of an incident some years before. Attracted by a particularly comely squaw, he offered a horse, two blankets and a supply of tobacco for her. When the offer was refused, he crept into the Indian camp, his features hidden by a dog skin, and kidnapped the woman.

Taylor's whisky was spilled on the ground and each man was sentenced – by Macleod, acting in his capacity as magistrate – to six months in jail or a $250 fine. A friend paid the fine for Taylor, who eventually became a respectable hotel-keeper at Fort Calgary, doing big business with a billiard-table he hauled all the way from Fort Benton. The black man was less fortunate. With no one to bail him out, he escaped and froze to death on the prairie.

By the spring of 1875 there was a sizeable jail population. Macleod dished out tough but even-handed justice for lesser offences. (A whisky-trader named Tincup Joe, who was fined $250, had his horse and wagon confiscated, and got three months in jail, said to Macleod on hearing the sentence: "Jedge, I'm in luck to ketch you in good humour.") Those accused of more serious crimes were escorted 900 miles to Winnipeg for trial.

The warm Chinook winds of spring, while welcomed at the post, thawed the frozen earth floors into muddy quagmires and caused the earth roofs to drip steady streams of dirty water on to the men in their bunks. Clothing was in short supply, and uniform regulations were relaxed temporarily to allow the wearing of Indian gear. But conditions were never as bad as rumoured in the east, where the Toronto Press was reporting that all but four of the Mounties' horses were dead and that the men were starving.

During 1875, more forts were built to spread police power over a wider area. Fort Calgary went up at the junction of the Bow and Elbow rivers. Inspector Jarvis left Edmonton and moved 20 miles down the Saskatchewan River to establish Fort Saskatchewan, and Fort Walsh was built in the Cypress Hills.

A missionary, Reverend John MacDougall, said that the decrease in Indian violence and drunkenness and the general calming of the country was "a miracle wrought before our eyes." It was soon peaceful enough for Macleod and two other officers to be joined by their wives.

For the rest of the Mounties, life was not without its pleasures. One wrote of a dance: "The ladies, who attended in numbers, were the half-breed belles, well dressed and some very, very good looking. Many of these old-time dances held at MacLeod and other posts were far ahead, in the way of fun and hearty exercise, of the prim and select affairs usual after the country became settled"

CAVALRY FOR PEACE

The sight of a uniformed horseman, traditionally a symbol of war, took on new meaning for the inhabitants of Canada's west when the North-West Mounted Police arrived after their arduous trek from Dufferin in 1874. These men brought peace: they compelled obedience to law, fed the hungry, cared for the sick and generally served as society's odd-job men. The scope of their responsibilities, extending far beyond the bounds of normal police duties, is indicated by the paintings and drawings on the following pages, specially commissioned to show the Mounties' work.

The Mounties push west in a scene that recalls the difficulties of their journey. Tired horses had to be led. Wagons broke down. The Métis guides were not to be trusted. And until the Mounties reached buffalo country, they had only their own scrawny cattle for food.

The Great March to the West

"I have seen this whole force obliged to drink liquid which when passed through a filter was still the colour of ink," said G.A. French, who led the Mounties on their journey to the west. "The fact of horses and oxen failing and dying for want of food never disheartened or stopped them, but pushing on, on foot, with dogged determination, they carried through the service required of them."

In addition to the hardships of the Great March itself, Mounties worried about what awaited them at the end of it. Their guides told them that 500 whisky-traders were digging entrenchments and fortifying stockades to make a stand. French doubted the truth of such stories, but had to keep his exhausted force in fighting shape, just in case. "I hoped for the best," he said, "while determined to prepare for the worst." The reports were false. The whisky-traders scuttled to the United States just before the Mounties arrived.

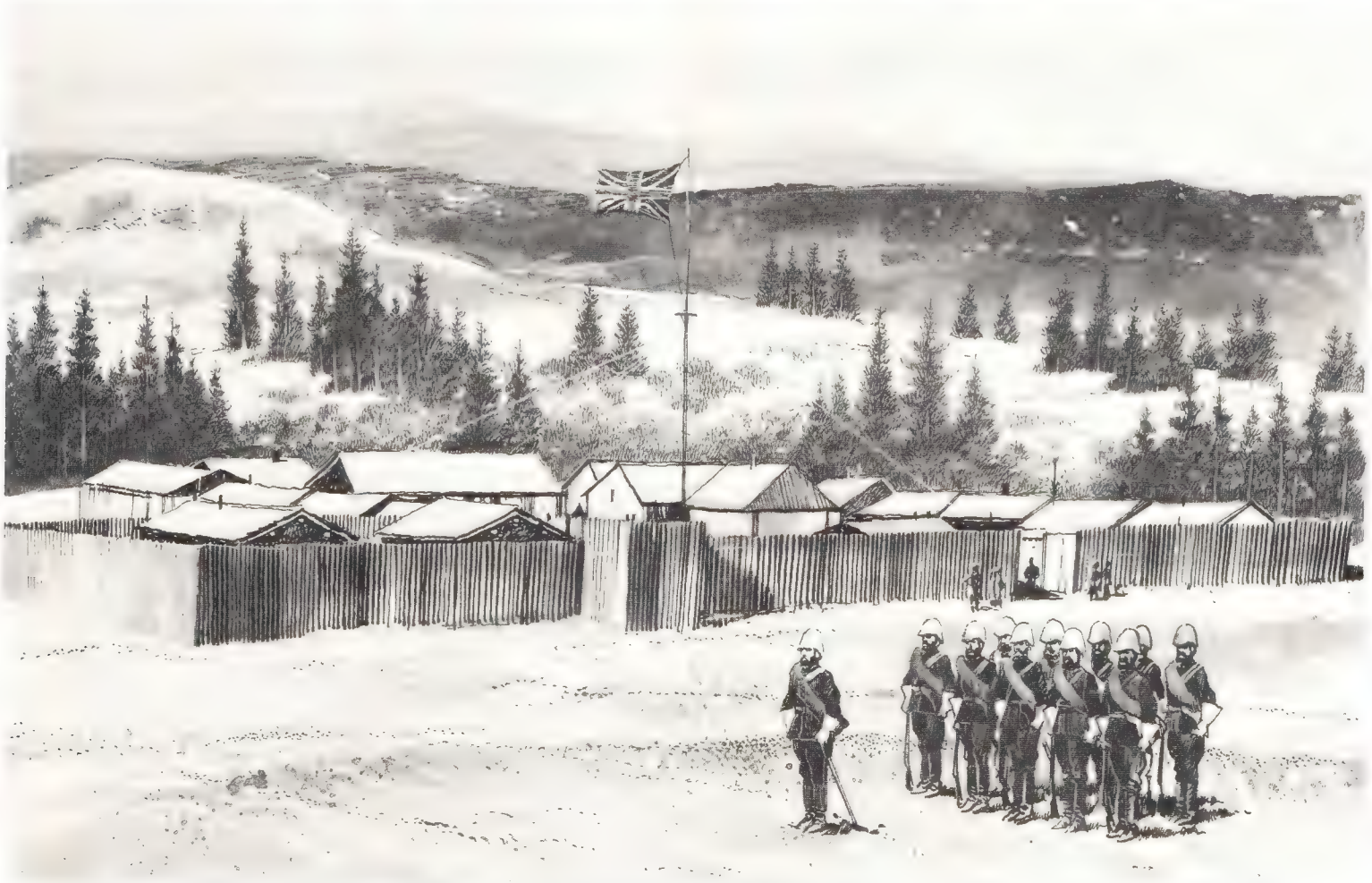
The Mounties kept Dawson, Klondike gold-rush boom town, as law-abiding as a Sunday school.

On Duty Without Pause

Soon the Mounties ran virtually every aspect of life in the North-West Territories. The 300 men arranged weddings, conducted funerals, pursued the ubiquitous American horse-thief – "a desperado of the worst description," said one Mountie, "who holds the life of a man as cheaply as that of an animal" – and patrolled 375,000 square miles, logging almost a million horseback miles in a single year.

The Klondike gold-rush added 40,000 hard-bitten prospectors to their responsibilities. Samuel Steele, the Mountie commander at Dawson City, described a typical day: "I retired to rest about 2 a.m., rose at six, visited every institution under me each day, sat on boards and committees until midnight, attended to the routine of the command without an adjutant, saw every prisoner daily, and was in the town station at midnight to see how things were going."

An even more remarkable achievement was the Mounties' excellent relationship with the North-West Territories' 27,000 Indians. "The police have protected us," said one chief, "as the feathers of a bird protect it from the frosts of winter."



Policemen on parade observed dress regulations despite primitive conditions at the forts.

To the newly arrived homesteader, a Mountie's visit was a vital link with civilization.

The trust that Mounties established at informal pow-wows like this kept Indians peaceful.

To traverse northern Canada's vast and forbidding winter wastes was bad enough, but a Mountie would often undertake the task with a sick man on his hands.

Mercy in the Wilderness

It was a Mountie's duty to protect human life, even if it meant putting his own at risk. Sick men – white or Indian – were often carried across miles of wilderness to medical help. Constable A. Pedley left Fort Chipewyan on such a journey in December, 1904, taking a missionary who had had a mental breakdown to Fort Saskatchewan, 500 miles away. His charge, wrapped in heavy furs against temperatures that dropped to 50 degrees below zero, was strapped to the sled, while Pedley pushed through the storms and deep drifts on foot. The sick man refused to eat, broke his bonds and attacked the dogs, and when loosed for a moment's exercise made a suicidal dash for the snow-covered wastes. After three nerve-racking weeks, Pedley delivered the patient – and immediately collapsed with a nervous breakdown of his own that hospitalized him for six months.

Sub-inspector, full dress, 1878

Sub-inspector, 1879

Corporal, 1878

The Redcoats' Changing Fashions

The original Mountie uniform (left) was modelled on the flashy dress of an English dragoon, and soon proved too elaborate. Few Mounties wore the helmet unless obliged to. "On trips", wrote Commissioner Macleod in 1880, "they are almost invariably carried in the wagon and get greatly damaged by the knocking about." The pill-box-shaped forage-cap then adopted proved equally unsuitable, since it protected the wearer from neither the sun nor the rain. Two decades passed until it was finally replaced by the wide-brimmed, cowboy-style hat. Klondike gear was for winter work and gold lace surrendered to trail dust, but one important feature survives unchanged: the scarlet of the Mounties' dress tunic.

Trooper, winter dress, 1882

Trooper, work dress, 1897

Trooper, 1901

II Peace with the Indians

The most remarkable achievement of the Mounties was to maintain peace with, and among, the Indians of Canada for so long while a brutish, seemingly endless war raged between white and red man on the U.S. side of the border. The difference can probably be traced to each nation's attitude towards the original inhabitants of the plains.

In the United States, the Indian was considered at worst a threat, at best a nuisance, and in any case was to be dealt with by extermination (Hollywood did not invent the phrase, "The only good Indian is a dead Indian"). An American who came to settle in Canada asked Macleod "if we had the same law here as on the other side . . . if he was justified in shooting any Indian who approached his camp after being warned not to advance."

In Canada, the Mounties ensured that the law was used as forcefully to protect the red man as the white. Consequently, not a single Mountie was killed by an Indian until 1879, and then not by a war-party but by a lone horse-thief.

An incident in 1876 showed the success of this policy. Crowfoot, the great Chief of the Blackfeet, invited a Mountie officer to his Council and explained that he had received a message and gift of tobacco from the Sioux across the boundary. "Come and help us against the U.S. cavalry," said the Sioux, "and we in turn will help you fight the whites in Canada, whose army [the Mounted Police] is known to be small in number."

Crowfoot was troubled. If he said yes, the Sioux promised his braves many horses, mules and white women. If he said no, the Sioux vowed they would attack his people. The police officer assured him that if the Blackfeet were attacked "we were bound to help them, they being subjects of the country." Crowfoot was pleased with this response and rejected the Sioux proposal. He was even more pleased later when he received a personal message from "the Great Mother," Queen Victoria, thanking him for his loyalty.

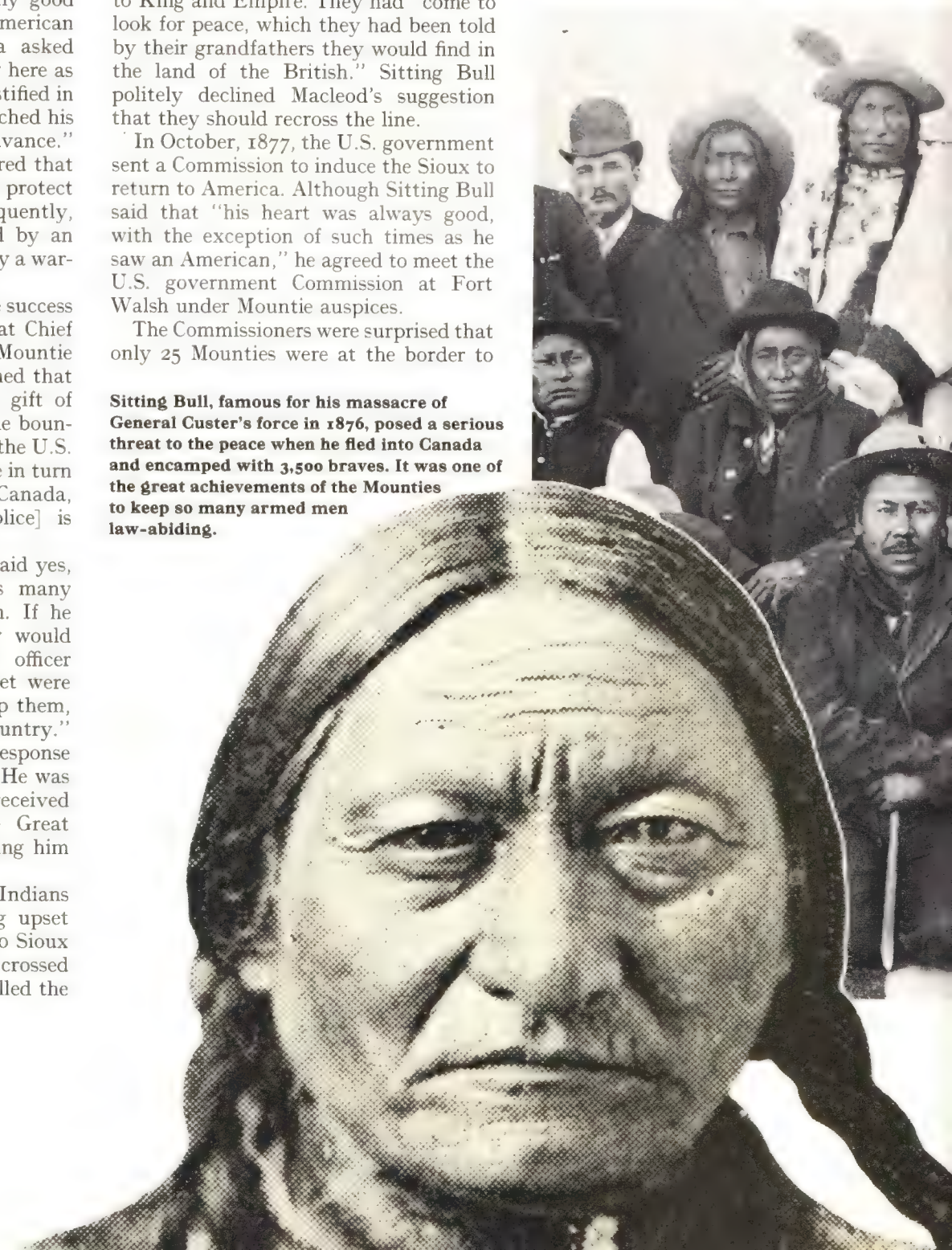
The good relationship with the Indians came dangerously near to being upset during 1876 and 1877, when 3,500 Sioux led by the famous Sitting Bull crossed the "Medicine Line" – as they called the border because it magically prevented the U.S. Army from pursuing them – after the massacre of General Custer's force at Little Big Horn. The presence of so many fierce warriors, and of so many stomachs which would compete for the already shrinking herds of buffalo, disturbed Canada's Blackfeet, Cree and Assiniboine Indians.

When Mountie officers came to their camp, the Sioux greeted them warmly, announced themselves to be fellow British subjects and proudly displayed George III medals given to their ancestors for loyalty to King and Empire. They had "come to look for peace, which they had been told by their grandfathers they would find in the land of the British." Sitting Bull politely declined Macleod's suggestion that they should recross the line.

In October, 1877, the U.S. government sent a Commission to induce the Sioux to return to America. Although Sitting Bull said that "his heart was always good, with the exception of such times as he saw an American," he agreed to meet the U.S. government Commission at Fort Walsh under Mountie auspices.

The Commissioners were surprised that only 25 Mounties were at the border to escort them to the meeting, and positively alarmed to learn that Fort Walsh's total strength was no more than 60 men. Throughout the night before the interview, war-painted Sioux warriors danced round a roaring fire before the fort, hurling threats at the nervous Americans.

Rain-in-the-Face, who had been credited personally with Custer's death, presented an especially terrifying figure: body blackened, ribs outlined in white, and face painted like a devil's beneath his buffalo-horns and long feathered headdress. Loudly enough to be heard inside



Sitting Bull, famous for his massacre of General Custer's force in 1876, posed a serious threat to the peace when he fled into Canada and encamped with 3,500 braves. It was one of the great achievements of the Mounties to keep so many armed men law-abiding.

the fort, Rain-in-the-Face kept urging an immediate attack, while older chiefs countered with pleas for restraint.

Macleod prudently ordered the chiefs to be searched for firearms as they entered the next morning. The Sioux shook hands with all the Mountie officers present and pointedly ignored the Americans. The Commission outlined its proposals for the Sioux to give up their arms and return to a U.S. reservation. Sitting Bull then started to list his grievances, but was told to answer yes or no. He turned to Macleod. Did they have to go back? No, Macleod replied, not if they obeyed Canadian law. Sitting Bull refused the U.S. terms, and the Americans departed.

One small but poignant gesture came from the meeting. The Sioux gave Macleod General Custer's pocket-watch, taken from his body after the battle, and Macleod had it sent to Custer's widow.

Sitting Bull and his people lived peacefully in Canada for five years until 1882. By that year the buffalo had vanished, and hunger forced the Sioux Indians to recross the "Medicine Line" and surrender to the American government.

Blood Indians cheerfully pose for the camera in 1877 after signing a treaty that gave them a permanent place in the Canadian state. Their satisfaction ensured a lasting peace.

Although Canada's Indians were keeping the peace during this period when few pioneers ventured on to the plains, the government knew that formal treaties would be necessary if the land were to be opened up for large-scale settlement without violence. Most preparations for negotiations were handled by the Mounties until 1880, when a Department of Indian Affairs was created.

The most crucial of these treaties was that made with the Blackfeet and related tribes in 1877. Lieutenant-Governor David Laird, Chief Executive of the North-West Territorities, led the government negotiators, while the Mounted Police had to find and notify tribes of the big pow-wow to be held at Blackfoot Crossing on the Bow River, and to make sure such a large assembly of Indians did not lead to trouble.

One hundred and eight policemen, with 119 horses and two nine-pounder guns, were on duty at the small valley 90 miles from Fort Macleod when Indians began arriving in their thousands, bringing their homes, their families and dogs, and some 15,000 horses and ponies.

"It was a stirring and picturesque scene," wrote Inspector Denny. "Great bands of grazing horses, the mounted warriors threading their way among them, and as far as the eye could reach, the white Indian lodges glimmering among the trees along the river bottom. By night the valley echoed to the dismal howling of the camp's curs and from sun to sun drums boomed from the tents. Dancing, feasting, conjuring, incantations over the sick, prayers for success in the hunt or in war . . . a panorama of wild life vastly novel and entertaining. . . . Never before had such a concourse of Indians assembled on Canada's western plains."

Considering the variety of tribes present, it was remarkable that there was not a single incident of violence. There were Blackfeet, Bloods, Piegans, Sarcees and Stonies. Bands of Crees, although not involved, were drawn by curiosity, and large numbers of half-breeds arrived, hoping to get some of the payments they knew would be handed out.

In some ways it was like a trade convention. Dealers in furs and buffalo robes, sellers of guns and suppliers of groceries set up their tents for business. The

Hudson's Bay Company sent its agents and American ranchers from Montana arrived with horses for sale.

Festivities continued for a full week while chiefs haggled with the government over terms, frequently threatening to walk out on the pow-wow when one or another thought a rival tribe was getting a better deal, such as a more promising location for a reserve.

The agreement, known as "Treaty No. 7," was signed on September 22, 1877, by Laird, Macleod, Crowfoot and a nomenclatorial hotch-potch of other chiefs: Old Sun, Rainy Chief, Heavy Shield, and Sitting-on-an-Eagle-Tail; Bull Head, Bull Elk, Fiend Bull, Bull Shield, Bull Backfat and Bull-Turn-Round; not to forget Rabbit Carrier, Heavily Whipped, Stolen Person and Daylight.

The Indians surrendered to the government "all their rights, titles, and privileges whatsoever" to all their land. They retained the right to hunt freely (subject, it said in small print, to regulations), were given in perpetuity reserves amounting to a square mile of land for each family of five, $12 cash for each man, woman and child and the promise of an annuity "afterwards for ever."

They were also promised yearly supplies of ammunition and clothing; government-paid teachers upon request; tools (each band could have 10 axes, five handsaws, five augers and one grindstone); a cow each (chiefs were promised a bull); or, if inclined towards farming, they could have, instead of a cow, two hoes, one spade, one scythe, two hay-forks, a plough for each three families, one harrow, and potatoes, barley, oats and wheat to sow.

Mountie officers dispensed the payments: $58,157 to almost 5,000 Indians, a procedure complicated by the fact that no Indian, for reasons of superstition, would tell his own name (a second always had to be asked to identify the first). In addition, many made second trips through the payline after remembering that "they had another wife, another two more children, and others that they had blind mothers and lame sisters." It took a week to complete the payments.

The Mounties now had the task of preventing unscrupulous traders from defrauding their newly rich customers. The Indians received their money in notes of $1 and $20 denominations, but they could not tell one from the other; moreover, they cheerfully accepted labels off fruit jars or tins as proper change unless a policeman was there to watch.

Despite their comparative wealth, few Indians attempted to become cattle-breeders or dirt-farmers. Instead they continued to follow the buffalo, paying little regard to their diminishing numbers. If the buffalo went south to the United States, the Indians went south, and returned when the buffalo returned. There came a time, about 1878, when the herds did not return to Canada at all. The buffalo had met their end as a significant wild species.

By 1879, Indians in real distress were returning from the United States without buffalo meat, without, in fact, anything to eat at all. In despair, they went to the Mounted Police posts for help. They were in dire need of it. Inspector Denny said that the once-proud Blackfeet were reduced to eating grass along the road to Fort Walsh. "I have seen them when a steer was shot, rush on the animal with their knives before it had ceased kicking, cut away the flesh and, maddened by hunger, devour it raw."

Denny had no authorization, but he recognized a crisis. He immediately began buying all the cattle in his region and issuing meat to the Indians at the rate of 2,000 lb a day. Soon providing rations for hungry Indians was a routine police duty.

Because there was not always food to give them, however, relations between the tribes and the Mounties began to show strain. On one occasion, 400 Sarcees besieged Fort Calgary and would not leave when Denny said he had no more food. He told the Indians, who were getting belligerent, that if they did not move on to Fort Macleod, he would pull their wigwams down. They refused. With only 13 men he marched into the crowded camp and knocked down the lodge-pole of the leader's tent. One wild shot was fired by a concealed sniper, but the authority of the redcoat was by now so thoroughly established that the sullen tribesmen packed up and moved out.

Eventually, the tribes were coaxed on

Chiefs Bad Head (left) and Crowfoot (right) kept their treaty promises. "I will be the last to sign," said Crowfoot, "and I will be the last to break." Other chiefs reneged.

The peace-making handshake of the Cree chief with Governor Laird was dishonoured in 1885 when this tribe joined the Riel Rebellion.

to their reserves where the new Department of Indian Affairs supported them at near-subsistence level. They nurtured their resentment until 1885, when some of them joined half-breed Métis in the short-lived rebellion led by Louis Riel, who sought to halt the advance of settlers, the railway and government administration. The rebellion was rapidly crushed by troops hurried along the recently extended Canadian Pacific Railway. Thereafter, the Indians gave no further trouble.

Meanwhile, the Mounties' work had grown rapidly. In 1881, Macleod's successor as Commissioner, A.G. Irvine, pleaded for an increase in the Mounties' numbers. He pointed out that the 300 men were now scattered among 13 posts and regularly patrolled an area roughly the size of France and Germany combined. The government acquiesced.

As the number of ranches increased, so did the population of horse-thieves and rustlers, particularly those from Montana who worked a shuttle, stealing stock on one side of the border and selling it on the other. The Mounties became so efficient at apprehending bandits and recovering the animals that some ranchers seemed to expect the police to ride herd for them. This telegram received at a Mountie post was typical: "Indians stole team of horses from me last night. Will you please find them? Answer."

As they were the only government officials of any kind in much of the area, Mounties' duties were not confined to police work. They ran the only postal service between Manitoba and the Rockies, accepting letters with American stamps and delivering them to Fort Benton, Montana, for posting.

Neither were there any government health officers and the Mounties took on that job as well. One of them, a man named Holmes who was temporarily acting as a hospital steward at Qu'Appelle, fought a smallpox epidemic single-handed, travelling for days over snow-clogged trails in temperatures plunging to 30 degrees below zero, to vaccinate hundreds of Indians. Corporal D.B. Smith at Norway House near Lake Winnipeg waged a similar one-man campaign against scarlet fever and diphtheria that ravaged the Indians in his region. He nursed the sick, cleaned their huts and even buried those who died, since other Indians were afraid to touch the bodies.

As Commissioner of the Mounties in 1885, A.G. Irvine obeyed government orders to take the defensive in the Riel Rebellion, and was then forced to resign by the howl of Press criticism that greeted his inaction.

A DOOMED NATION

Bobbing and whirling in the Buffalo Dance (above), North American Indians sought to ensure the fertility of the animal on which their lives depended. They used his flesh for food, his hair for ornament, his tanned skin for clothing and tents, his bones for tools, and his dried dung for fuel. One of the last glimpses of this traditional existence was recorded in 1832 by George Catlin, an American artist who painted the scenes on this page. Fifty years later the traditional Indian way of life was in ruins.

An Indian closes on his quarry at the gallop. Until the 19th Century, when Spanish horses reached Canada, they had hunted on foot.

Indian encampments like this had to be easy to pack and move since the migrations of the buffalo imposed a nomadic life on people who followed the great herds across the prairies.

Sad End for a Proud People

The introduction of the rifle at first enabled the Indian to kill more buffalo. He ate better and began to fashion skins into garments with sleeves and trouser-legs, emulating Europeans. But white hunters with guns wastefully over-killed. The buffalo vanished, and with them the red man's traditional existence. Now he had to dress in manufactured fabrics. When his teepees of buffalo hide wore out, he was forced to build cabins of logs or earth. To eat, he was compelled to learn farming – reluctantly. Proud Blackfoot tribesmen, especially, thought it demeaning for a warrior to become "the servant of a cow."

Metal kettles and tools made him forget his skills with bone, skin and woven grasses. His restless feet were confined to the reserves, his restless spirit was dampened by the whites' religious doctrines or their alcohol. His people, with no natural immunity to smallpox, tuberculosis or measles, were decimated by European diseases. It is true that in British North America he fared better than his cousins in the United States, where the rate of Indian population loss was twice as great. The Canadian Indian, however, was just as surely swamped by European settlers.

A young brave poses for a study in incongruity as he stands before a Blackfoot teepee wearing a Scottish tartan, his British rifle sheathed in buffalo skin.

Ermine Horses, no longer possessing the magnificent buffalo robes befitting a chief of the Bloods, makes do with a blanket.

European clothes, like these worn by an Indian family on their reserve, were often inadequate protection against the severe winters of the North-West Territories.

Awkward and glum, three chiefs converted to Christianity are put on show at a Methodist meeting in Ontario, trophies of the missionaries' work among the Indians.

III The White Invasion

The building of the Canadian Pacific Railway added to the Mounties' already demanding chores. Advancing across the plains mile by mile with the rails themselves was an army of tough labourers, gamblers, swindlers, prostitutes and pimps. Police frequently were called to settle disputes between contractors and navvies. In 1885, a mere eight Mounties held off a mob of 300 labourers who were determined to tear apart the boss's office – and the boss – to get their overdue wages. Having quietened the workers, the police compelled the contractor to pay up.

After the rails reached Calgary, some Montana ranchers drove their cattle there to transport them east by train. This required the posting of a lone Mountie at the border to remind American drovers that cowboys were not allowed to wear guns in Canada. As a result, there was a lower murder rate north of the boundary and train-robbing never became a normal occurrence there.

The completion of the railway and quelling of the Riel Rebellion in 1885 opened the North-West Territories to a sudden rush of homesteaders. The Mounties' numbers were increased to 1,000 men to meet the new heavy demands.

Prairie fires, long a hazard, were a terrible threat now that more people could be trapped by their flames; the nearest thing to a fire brigade was the Mounted Police force. These holocausts were formidable. One, whipped by strong winds, leaped the Saskatchewan River at a point where it was 900 feet wide. Another, burning across a front of 30 miles, was finally subdued by 10 Mounties and a handful of settlers, but not before it completely blackened 500 square miles.

Once, a constable named Conradi, on patrol, learned that a family was in the path of a fire. He could see the smoke on the horizon. Other settlers said it was impossible to save them, and urged him not to risk his life. Riding hard for several hours he reached the farm just as the blaze did. The grateful homesteader later said that the constable fought "until he was nearly suffocated, his hat burned off his head, hair singed and vest on fire. My wife and family," he added, "owe their lives to Mr. Conradi."

Such gratitude was not forthcoming for police diligence in another field: enforcing the prohibition of alcohol in the North-West Territories. With the influx of settlers, bootlegging boomed again. Claiming they suffered "worse than slaves in Siberia," settlers held meetings to protest against police who, they said, insisted on "subpoenaing respectable citizens to give evidence as whisky sneaks."

Every conceivable ruse was used to get round the law. Booze arrived in jars labelled "pickles", in eggs that had been emptied of yolk and white, and then cunningly resealed, and in boxes marked "Bibles". Liquor supplies going to British Columbia, where prohibition did not apply, were hijacked on their way through the North-West Territories. A railway truck loaded with barrels of spirits bound for Vancouver, which was wet, was left for one night in a siding at Calgary, which was dry. By morning it had been considerably lightened by means of holes drilled through the floor of the truck and into the barrels.

The enforcement of prohibition brought unpopularity to the Mounties, but increased the morale of the force. Working alone or in twos or threes at remote stations, they depended heavily on their *esprit de corps*, and maintained it even when some politicians in Ottawa were calling them "parasites" and urging the force be abolished, as happened in 1889. Despite the Mounties' success, they were frequently attacked in Parliament as a waste of scarce public funds.

Lawrence W. Herchmer, who succeeded Irvine as Commissioner, showed confidence in his men's morale by discouraging any pursuit of deserters, unless

Mounties at Canada's Yukon border barred American gold-rush miners carrying guns.

Mountie patrols riding the wheat country had to cover ever longer distances in the 1890s when population in the North-West shot up and vast new areas were settled for farming.

they had taken horses with them. "I want the Mounted Police Force," he said, "to be the hardest to get into and the easiest to get out of in the world."

The great gold-rush of 1897–98 to the area of the Klondike River, far north in the Yukon Territory, further stretched Mountie manpower. By now, they were back down to 500 as a result of government economies. At the frozen Klondike goldfields, their duties covered the whole span of governmental services. They ran the post office, acted as customs agents, collected taxes, developed trails, supervised navigation on rivers, tended the sick, cared for the insane and enforced the law in a multi-national population of miners some of whom, observed one Mountie, seemed like "the result of a general jail delivery."

Though the United States's Alaska, through which prospectors travelled to the Yukon Territory, was dominated by Soapy Smith of Skagway, whose gang regularly murdered, robbed and swindled prospectors from the coast right up to the Yukon border, just across the line in Mountie country, the strict rule of law prevailed. The force's incorruptibility was by now so accepted that miners and bankers regularly entrusted hundreds of thousands of dollars in gold to Mounties earning less than $1 a day, who carried it securely to Victoria, British Columbia.

For such tasks as these, and for their formidable peace-keeping record, the Mounties acquired an enviable reputation for success. Popular mythology credited them with "always getting their man." This was not, of course, true but the story of a case solved by Mounties in the Yukon Territory at the turn of the century serves to explain their only slightly exaggerated reputation.

As a matter of routine, police kept track of parties moving along trails in the region, lest a tenderfoot should get lost in the wilderness and not be missed. On Christmas Day, 1899, four men named O'Brien, Olsen, Clayson and Relphe left Minto in the Upper Yukon. When they did not turn up at the next post within a few days, Mounties began a search.

Ten days after Christmas one of them, O'Brien, was discovered in the woods trying to make his way in a wide circle round the Tagish Mounted Police station. He was carrying a wad of bank-notes and a gold nugget. The police had no evidence that a crime had been committed, but knew O'Brien as a ne'er-do-well and held him while investigating. Could he have robbed and murdered his companions?

A Constable Pennecuick, combing the trail from Minto, found a place by a river where some trees had been cut down. He collected chips of the wood, which appeared to have been chopped with an axe with three nicks in the blade, one at the top, two at the bottom: a distinctive pattern. (It was later proved that the axe had been given O'Brien on his release from Dawson Jail months earlier.)

Remembering that Christmas had been a morning of soft snow followed by a hard freeze at night, Pennecuick swept a path that led to the river and, as he suspected he would, found on the lower crust of frozen snow signs that heavy objects had been dragged to the water's edge. He also found three bullets from a ·32 revolver and one from a ·45 rifle.

Then came a stroke of luck. He ran into a dog that he recognized as O'Brien's. "Go home, go home," Pennecuick ordered, and the dog obligingly led him to a cabin hidden in the woods. There he discovered a ·45 rifle and, after raking the snow, some fragments of teeth, burned clothing, a button bearing the name of a Seattle firm (Clayson was from Seattle), a key (later found to fit Clayson's safe in Seattle), and a strange antique coin (Relphe had carried it for luck).

The evidence was enough to keep O'Brien in jail till spring, when the bodies turned up on a sand-bar in the river, shot through torsos and heads. They were unrecognizable, but the teeth fragments

continued on p.1288

Three forlorn survivors from another age visit a Canadian Pacific station to see the iron rails that transformed their land with a flood of new settlers. One chief, Crowfoot, was given a life pass on the railway for preventing rebellion when the tracks invaded his tribe's reserve in 1883.

In a movement called "The Bridal Arch," half of the Musical Ride troop passes beneath the lances of the other half.

The pattern of the troopers' lances gives this formation its name: "The Dome." Here it is seen from the centre.

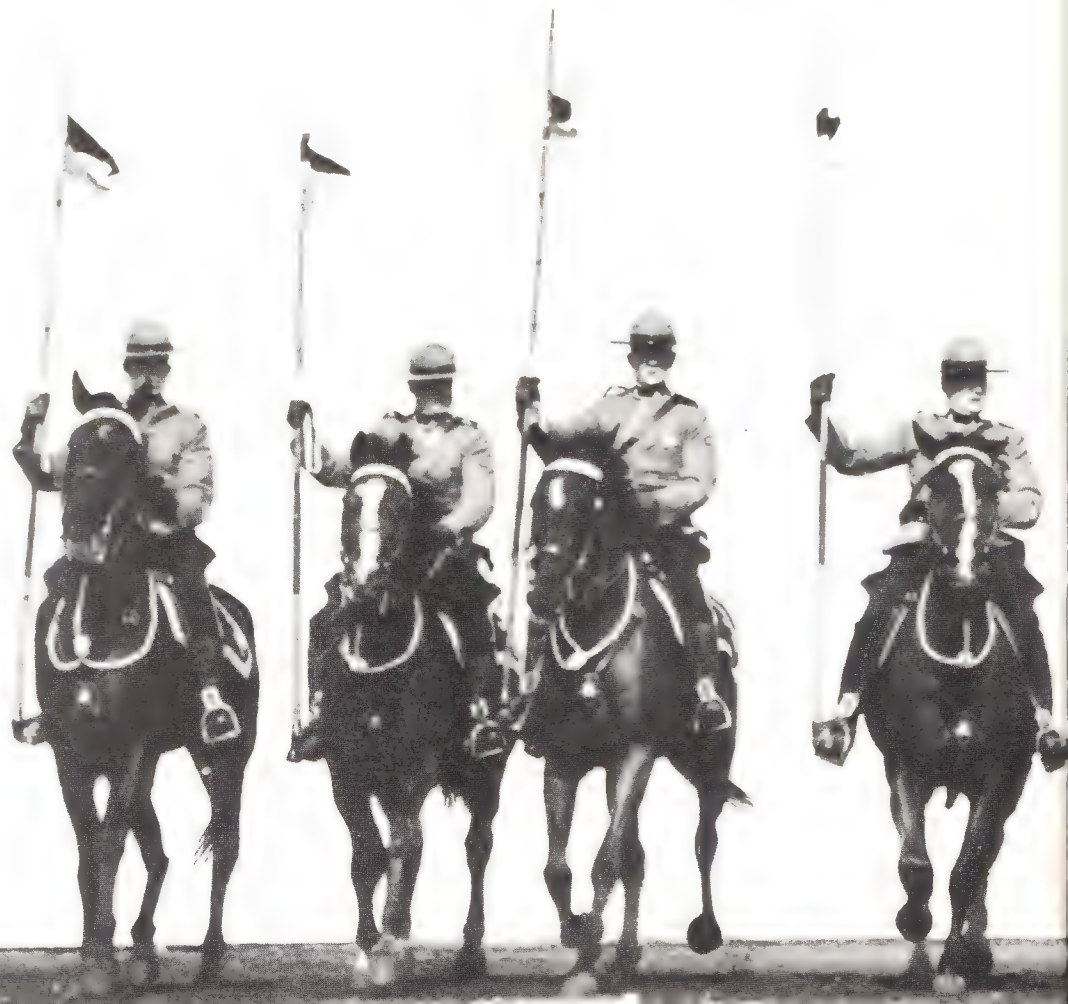
Twenty-eight of the 32 horsemen, after performing intricate manoeuvres, finally emerge to complete "The Dome."

THE LAST MOUNTED MOUNTIES

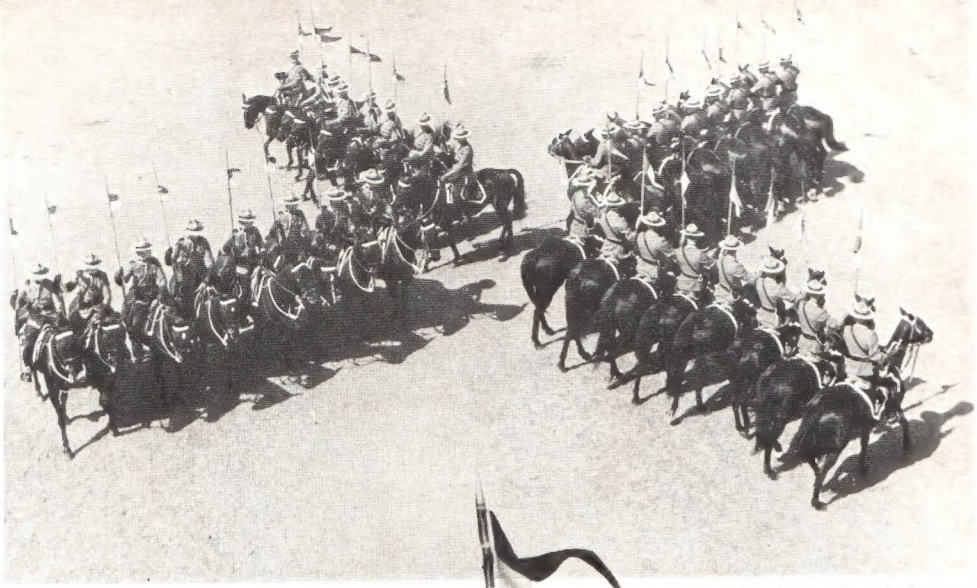
In 1876, when horsemanship was essential to every Mountie's work, a riding instructor who had served with the British 9th Lancers worked out a riding-to-music routine to improve the Mounties' cavalry drill. When a unit of police horsemen took their "Musical Ride" on a tour of Canadian fairs in 1904, what had begun as training became an exercise in public relations.

Horsemanship is no longer essential – only volunteers learn to ride – but the Musical Ride is. Tourists flock to Ottawa to see it. The routine and the music which accompanies it rarely vary. The troop goes through a series of patterns on the trot, pauses for lance drill, completes another series at the canter and closes with a charge at the gallop.

Mounties still breed horses on their own ranch, and still operate a riding-school, but the main purpose of both ranch and school is to supply performers for the Musical Ride, performed by the sole surviving mounted unit in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

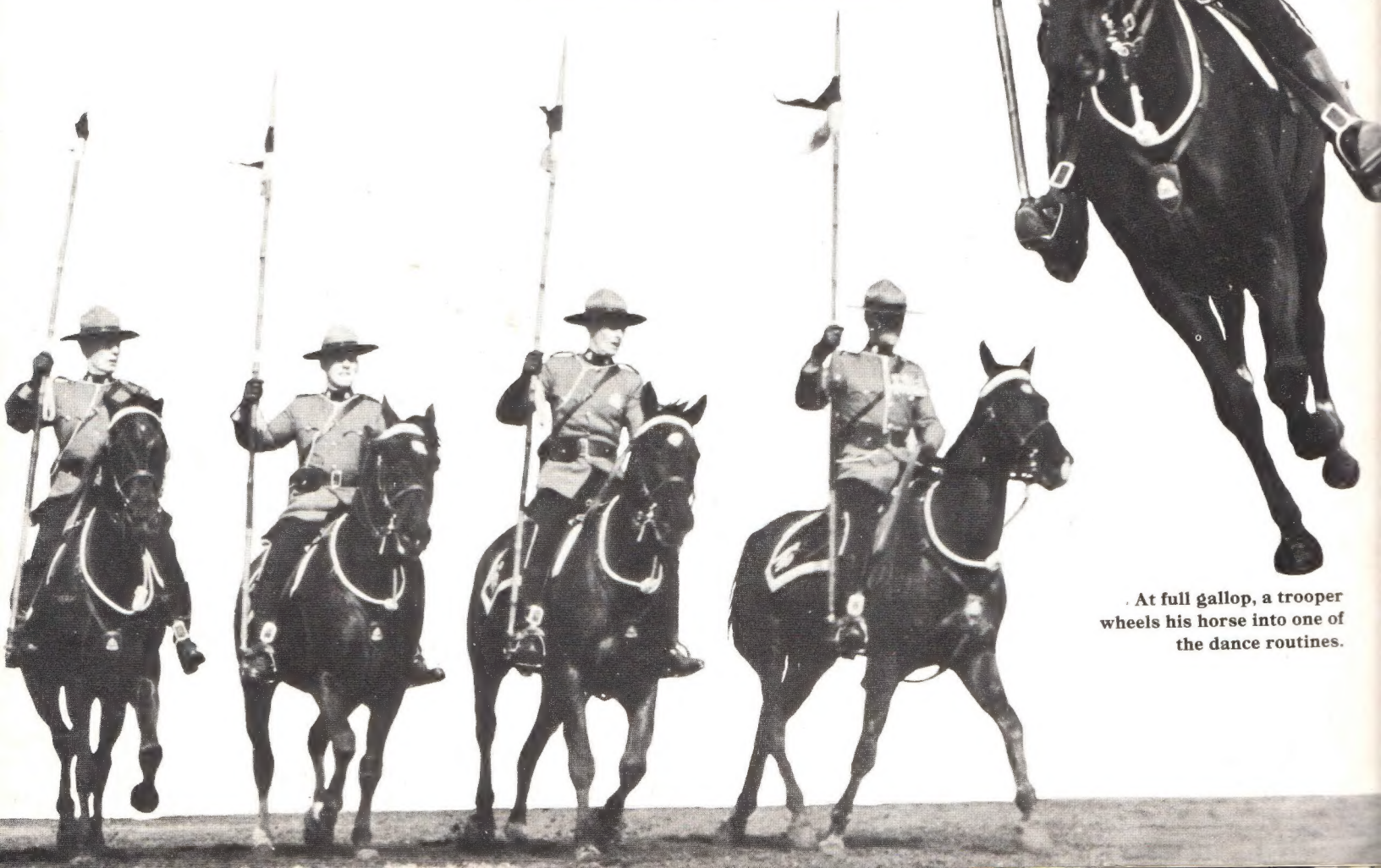


Horses, always black, were bred at old Fort Walsh until the stud was moved nearer Ottawa the only post where horses are still used.



In "The Star," the inside horses pivot while those on the outside canter to maintain the formation.

Riders prepare for the March Past. When the Ride was cancelled in 1954, newspapers demanded its return as a "national symbol."



At full gallop, a trooper wheels his horse into one of the dance routines.

found at O'Brien's cabin matched the bullet-shattered teeth of the corpses.

The trial was long, because of the astounding number of exhibits the Mounted Police had amassed as evidence, but within half an hour of retiring the jury found O'Brien guilty of murder. He was executed. The case had cost about $100,000, but the fame it created for the Mounties' determination and skill in detective work helped account for the rarity of murders in subsequent years.

Examples of diligent detection abound in Mounted Police history. One inspector travelled beyond the Arctic Circle for 5,153 miles over a two-year period – the longest patrol on record – in response to vague rumours of a murder, only to conclude in his report that two Eskimos had killed in self-defence and should not be prosecuted.

Starting with nothing but a belt-buckle from a corpse in Alberta, another policeman spent three months tracing the victim's identity in Michigan (where the buckle had been made) and searching hotel registers all over western Canada and Montana for the suspected killer's tell-tale handwriting – not his name, which he changed frequently, but his handwriting. When finally apprehended the murderer went peaceably. "I always felt the redcoats would get me," he said.

The Mounties' most dangerous enemy was not the man he pursued but the environment in which he worked. No criminal could match the natural elements of the northern wilderness for hostility. Many Mounties died, often stoically. For example, Constable G. Mahoney fought for hours to extricate himself from quicksand. When submerged to his neck he prayed and shouted his last will and testament to his half-breed companion before sinking from sight.

The famous four-man Lost Fitzgerald Patrol left Fort McPherson in the Arctic Circle for Dawson in the Yukon Territory in February, 1911. Slowed by storms to five miles a day, they lost their way, suffered frostbite, ran out of food, killed some of their sled dogs to feed the others and then killed the rest to eat themselves and finally died – but not before hanging their dispatch-bag containing mail on a beam in an abandoned cabin and marking a trail to it. The leader of the party left a note scrawled in charcoal on a scrap of paper: "All money in dispatch-bag and bank, clothes, etc., I leave to my dearly beloved mother Mrs. John Fitzgerald, Halifax. God bless all. F. J. Fitzgerald, R.N.W.M.P."

The "R" had been conferred on the N.W.M.P. by King Edward VII in 1904. In 1920 the Dominion government changed the "N.W." to "C" and made the force responsible for all federal law enforcement in Canada. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police today also provide police service by contract to all but two of the Canadian provinces (Quebec and Ontario maintain their own provincial police forces).

Today, it is much like other national police forces, with an intelligence division to winkle out spies, air and marine divisions with fleets of aeroplanes and boats and national radio and telex networks. In the north, snowmobiles have replaced sleds pulled by dog-teams, and while horses are still used for training and tourist attractions such as the "Musical Ride," the last mounted detachment, at Alexis Creek, British Columbia, gave up their one saddle-horse and one pack-horse more than a decade ago.

But tradition has its value, and Royal Canadian Mounted Police recruits learning how to control riots, identify illegal drugs and track the American Mafia are still told the story of a young constable found frozen to death almost a century ago with a note in the pocket of his scarlet tunic: "Lost. Horse dead. Am trying to push ahead. Have done my best"

These Mounties in London for the 1897 Jubilee got two months' leave and, said one officer, had "a right royal time."

Private, 5th Royal Irish Lancers, 1890

IN NEXT WEEK'S ISSUE

THE NEW ROME